
**Idea Sharing: Using Shakespeare's
Measure for Measure as a Means of Developing
Different Modes of Student Authorship**

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Introduction

Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is a critique of King James I's concept of an absolute monarchy, in his constitutional treatise, namely *Basilikon Doron*. In the light of modern reader response theories, and with due regard to Renaissance literacy practices, I show how Shakespeare's authorial method of appropriating *Basilikon Doron* can be emulated through the design of writing activities for advanced EAP classes, or as part of university English language and literature syllabuses.

Measure for Measure is inseparable from the spiritual and secular concerns which James I had explicitly addressed in his 1599 doctrine, *Basilikon Doron*. (Bullough, 1958; Stevenson, 1959). However, Shakespeare reformulated literary and political conventions in the king's treatise on the nature of good government into a subversive play script that revels in bad government. I draw on *Measure for Measure* as a textual source for extending students' historical knowledge and constitutional awareness. The article first considers *Measure for Measure* as a self-reflexive drama that explores aspects of Jacobean authorship. It then discusses the pedagogical principles underlying the

student reader response tasks. Shakespeare interrogated King James's understanding of an author by mainly crafting his play script out of *Basilikon Doron*.² I include sample activities on *Measure for Measure* that empower advanced level EAP or English language and literature students to discover the drama's narrative, poetic and meta-theatrical elements through their own creative writings.

The relationship between *Basilikon Doron* and *Measure for Measure*

Basilikon Doron is James I's open book to his son, Prince Henry. This 'kingly gift' advises the young prince on the ethics of government and how to stay in power (p.1). However, as Pope (1949) notes when the king first wrote *Basilikon Doron*, his eldest son was far from being close to inheriting the crown. James's real intention in this pseudo intimate text is to underline his personal belief in the divine right of monarchy and to emphasise how such a principle is socially authorised in a hierarchical model of human relations.

King James's understanding of the function of an author therefore provides an interpretive framework for *Measure for Measure*. It is worth noting the interchangeable C17 usage of the term 'author' with particular reference to the narrative voice and political status of James I, in *Basilikon Doron*. According to Masten (1997), 'author' could mean 'absolute creator of a fictional or non imaginative work, a father figure [or an] inventor' (p.67). Masten further explains that the term 'author' signified an absolute monarch with the power to sanction the publication or performance of plays (p.64). James's literary reign fore-grounded these inter-related concepts of author in English culture. He presented himself as a divinely appointed father figure acting in

² James 1. *Basilikon Doron* full text , pp.1-42, on http://www.stoics.com/basilikon_doron.html as accessed on 14 May 2014 .

the best interests of his subjects. This is the role he projected onto himself in *Basilikon Doron* and in his actual public appearances. It demonstrates the indivisibility between acting and real life in the English Renaissance construct of a monarch as a public performer of public good. It also shows how this belief was politically inscribed in the public use of the king's personal writing voice.

The following quotation from *Basilikon Doron*, is, in fact, transmuted into Shakespeare's characterisation of the Duke protagonist in *Measure for Measure*.

'...for kings being public persons by reason of their office and authority, are as it were set (...) upon a public stage, in the sight of all the people, where all the beholders' eyes are attentively bent to look and pry in the least circumstance of their secret drifts' (p.3).³

Measure for Measure is a challenge to royal prerogative as represented in *Basilikon Doron*. Shakespeare explores the limitations of authorial control within a meta-theatrical context and common law framework. His *Duke* character, is seemingly the all controlling author of events who puts plots in motion, and then has to watch his plans fall apart for re-establishing his authority over his subjects. He abdicates from his responsibilities in order to demonstrate his power to off-stage and on-stage listeners; he adopts false spiritual powers in the guise of Friar Lodowick. This theatrical device of disguise establishes the contrast between Shakespeare as the invisible but omniscient playwright and the Duke as mere meta-dramatic author. In Shakespeare's play script every individual's action and speech is dependent on other characters' reactions to it. All direct and reported events are presented as a social chain of causes and effects. This is why events soon move beyond the control of the Duke, and why he has to depend on the direct intervention of Isabella, the Provost and

³ I have modernised the spellings.

Mariana, to rescue his plans from turning into a larger tragedy. It is integral to Shakespeare's overall design to manipulate the Duke as an authority figure who is not in authority over the play's irony.

Indeed, the character of the Duke enacts characteristics of the ideal ruler that James I imagined himself to be, in *Basiliakon Doron*. The Duke's role as a superior plotter combines with his status outside the drama as a narrator and judge; so the audience is invited to share his consciousness within the fiction. But the playwright remains distinct from the character of the Duke. We can thus see how working within a mode of mixed literacies that produced the play as a visual, oral and physical means of communication, Shakespeare was finding more sophisticated ways of representing different, conflicting narrative voices in his drama. Later, I will show how these particular meta-fictional devices within *Measure for Measure* can be pedagogically appropriated to explore students' choices of critical perspectives and narrative voices in their written responses to this play.

So far and from a new historicist perspective, we can see how *Measure for Measure* is an invitation to the audience and subsequent readers of the play to consider the effectiveness of James I's political method of self invention in *Basiliakon Doron*. The king creates an implied reader by addressing the letter to, 'Henry my dearest sonne and natural successor [sic]'. But the letter is not intended for a private reading, it is his statecraft manifesto, communicated in an intimate narrative voice (p.1). James I writes in the role of a virtuous, enlightened parent. He disguises his intention of using the document as a means of artful indoctrination, persuading his readers to subscribe to his views on government and the equity of the law. It illustrates the manipulation of a single addressee of his 'book': namely, prince Henry, to increase his public appeal by establishing a personal relationship with his readers. It is an important rhetorical strategy that students can perceive in the contemporary fusion of personal

writing voices of companies with circular letters.⁴ Similarly, *Measure for Measure* addresses the popular and literary concerns of its first royal off-stage audience through the symbiotic enactment of the Duke's private and public personality. One of the writing tasks at the end of this article encourages students to imagine a letter that Angelo might write to King James I, and to juxtapose two different addressees and styles in the letter. Such a task facilitates the transfer of the king's authorial technique to the student writer. Secondly, it treats King James I, Shakespeare and the student as authors with different critical agendas that are made transparent through the classroom writing process.

King James I crafted his authorial persona very carefully in *Basilikon Doron* by constantly alluding to his 'dear son', 'the charitable reader', 'and the integrities of the author (p.9). He expounds on Christian statecraft as a series of moral strategies. King James I equates himself with the authority of *Basilikon Doron*: king, author and text are one:

'Receive and welcome this Book then as a faithful
preceptor and counsellor unto you.' (p.3)
(...) 'the author(...) is the fountain and very being of
truth.' (p.3)

Whereas James I manipulates the reader/writer relationship of *Basilikon Doron* *Measure for Measure* manipulates the relationship between the audience and the Duke. The authority figure of the Duke comes under the same amount of scrutiny in the play as the subjects he has chosen to test: Angelo, Claudio, Isabella, the Provost, Escalus and Lucio. This is where Shakespeare's play script deviates from the polemical purpose of simply representing his patron king as the king saw himself.

⁴ British Prime Minister, David Cameron, might also exploit this rhetorical technique and link the responsibilities of parenting a family and a nation in an open letter to *The Times* newspaper.

Moreover, we see that while the Duke is intent on testing Angelo, the playwright is also preoccupied with giving his reader and off-stage audiences opportunities to evaluate the Duke as a model of arbitrary and morally suspect government. The problem is that the Duke falls short. Other characters, such as Lucio, the Provost and Isabella steal the show in taking control of situations that determine the outcome of events. The play provides the situational and verbal ironies that *Basilikon Doron* lacks. It also uses the cast of lower and higher order characters to dramatise the public issues that the king had addressed in this treatise. But unlike the King's treatise, it underlines rather than resolves conflicts concerning the criminal nature of poverty and the social implications of slander, celibacy and prostitution.⁵

From a dramatic narrative to narrative and discursive drama

Measure for Measure not only combines aspects of oracy and literacy, such as dialogues and letters, but, as Egan (2007) observes, it also echoes the legal, sexual, political and religious discourses of London's citizens thinly disguised as Viennese's ones. Shakespeare takes the consistently formal and non ironic style of King James's authoritative voice in *Basilikon Doron* and transposes it to a plurality of argumentative voices. These range from Pompey's comic rationale for sex out of wedlock, to Mistress Ovedone's defence of prostitution as a means of economic survival, to Angelo's intransigence that we cannot separate the criminal from the crime: and finally to Friar Ludowick's false theological comforts concerning life after death. The dramatist makes Pompey, Angelo, the Duke and Isabella embody intellectual and emotional issues that underlie the government of oneself and how such government impacts on others in the form and function of social and religious institutions.

⁵ Cf how James 1 pontificates on these issues in *Basilikon Doron*, passim.

Writing to simulate and accommodate mixed modes of oracy and literacy

Storytelling is subsumed to the overall purpose of creating *Measure for Measure's* theatrical irony, and of filling in information gaps for the off-stage audience. Accordingly, readers and audiences are encouraged not to make absolute moral judgements about the play's characters or the religious, economic and political issues that they embody and articulate. This is why the play can also be adapted to tasks where students evaluate both the play's controversial content and craftsmanship. Consequently, two of the later writing tasks focus on evaluating the open role of stories and arguments in Shakespeare's text.

Reader response theories and Shakespeare's writing craft

There are largely two opposing theories on the relationships between author and text: writer and reader (Radel, 1996). Whereas Wolfgang Iser (1978) claims the text's 'mastery over the reader', Stanley Fish sees the reader 'in primary control' of the text. (Radel, 1996, p.99). Fish's notion of an 'interpretive community' centres on the idea that groups of people share interpretive strategies for analysing the use of linguistic and genre conventions within a text, as a means of determining the author's intention. He contends that reading a text is actually 'writing one.' within the terms set by a culturally aware 'interpretive community'. Such a 'community' of readers has social expectations of a genre. Hence when the genre conventions are flouted by the author, for example, the expectation that a comic play has a totally happy ending, these readers seek alternative meanings or construe irony. Shakespeare was a politically creative reader of *Basilikon Doron*. We can see this in the intertextual relationship between King James's constitutional treatise and the ironic way that he has authored the role of the Duke in his play script. In particular, the

uneasy, comic denouement in the final Act of *Measure for Measure* subverts King James's tenets of a benign, absolute monarch.

The following are strategies that Carter and Long (1991), Beach (1993), and Selden and Widdowson (1993) see as intrinsic to studying literature. I adapt them to create reader response tasks on *Measure for Measure*.

- Reading the play involves being aware of the communicative impact of its linguistic and discursual deviation.
- Reading the play requires an awareness of how its irony is culturally mediated by the audience and the playwright, in its own time and in our time.
- Reading the play means understanding the role of its allusions in determining its cultural politics.

Measure for Measure's intertextuality underlines Shakespeare's art of writing drama as a form of reader response. Student writers can also create new texts out of those which already exist. This paper has discussed the play's authorship within its original context of production (circa 1603). I will proceed to show how elements of the content and craftsmanship of *Measure for Measure* can be incorporated into classroom writing tasks, which enable students to appreciate core components of the play's design.

The play as an eclectic learning resource for L2 students' language and writing development

Since a prerequisite to my choice of play is that the learning audience have never encountered it in any form before, I begin with its story and with activities that engage students in the heart of its moral dilemmas. Later, the class can read and see a digital version of the whole play. The extracts serve as stimuli, whereby L2 students adopt different roles and writing voices that encourage them to form individual relationships with the Shakespearean text.

The students critically analyse their creative responses. They thus see how any writer's craft corresponds to the type of text and genre requirements that he/she she writes. In class, they proceed to plan essay responses, read critical works, and give academic shape to ideas and issues that emerge from doing the creative tasks. Shakespeare's discourse exploits the dramatic potential of overwriting and underwriting; it is therefore useful for students to compare the repetitive and circular nature of some of the spoken arguments in the play with the rhetorical structure of a progressive argument, in a model, discursive essay. Additionally, some of the tasks treat essay writing as a collaborative, composition process where students exchange and discuss drafts. Here, writing is seen as process oriented, and involves regular audience feedback. Moreover, the concept of plagiarism may be as foreign to some L2 students as it would have been to Shakespeare and his use of sources. So some of the tasks encourage the students to find ways in which parts of the play correspond to ideas or events in *Basilikon Doron*. This raises their awareness of the cultural roots of originality, plagiarism and intertextuality in fictional and non-fictional writings.

The principles of task design⁶

These principles are then matched with particular activities, described below.

- (a) They develop students' understanding of how this drama's intertextual design is in accord with its narrative, discursive and theatrical functions.
- (b) They draw attention to the way in which physical elements are incorporated into the style of writing as stage instructions.

⁶ The learning objectives of particular tasks are encoded as (a) etc. Some tasks may activate more than one of these principles.

- (c) They raise awareness of how the genre of a play script differs from prose fiction.
- (d) They reveal how Shakespeare's methods of characterisation are a manipulation of both off-stage and on-stage's audiences' sympathy.
- (e) They encourage students to reflect on the relevance of the play's issues to contemporary society.
- (f) They raise students' awareness of the structural choices that Shakespeare made in the play (cf. Bowen, 1993).
- (g) They help to overcome cultural and language barriers facing L2 students reading a Renaissance, dramatic text.
- (h) They develop both the cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing.
- (i) They encourage students to read forwards and backwards in the play, so that they begin to see its contrasting patterns of scenes, speeches and characters, and how such juxtapositions establish the play's ironic structure.
- (j) They socialise the experience of writing, by combining collaborative and individual work, including a performance element to some of the writing.
- (k) They involve students in methods of improvisation and editing that emulate Shakespeare's composition process.
- (l) They encourage students to bring their own knowledge and cultural backgrounds into their writing.
- (m) They encourage students to rationalise their own writing decisions.
- (n) They integrate insights from the product, process and genre based approaches in a humanistic, cross cultural approach to L2 writing instruction. (Raines, 1991)

A sample continuum of some of the reader response tasks

These tasks are designed for very flexible use with different styles of learners. The important point is that the creative work is

connected to developing critical, academic writing skills and genre awareness.

Manipulating Sources

Task 1: (a), (c), (d), (e), (h), (k) (m)

Students consider the meaning of the phrase ‘measure for measure’ and predict the play’s story.

In two separate groups, students read and compare the complete texts of a written teacher summary of the play script with Marchette Chute’s (1956) story of *Measure for Measure*.⁷ They note examples of direct and reported speech, and reformulate the latter into direct quotations. Students from both groups then get together and compare facts and issues in each story. They discuss the issues that make Chute’s text more open to being dramatically developed in a range of characters and discourse styles. Instead of using Chute’s (1956) narrative version, the tutor could find an alternative narrative summary of the play on the internet.

Learners consolidate their discussion by writing a comparative evaluation of both narrative texts in terms of their plot, style, imagery, human interest and potential to be turned into a play script. The target reader is a theatre producer, looking for a text for an International Theatre Festival and their comparative text cannot exceed 500 words. Their texts:

- Experiment with a range of concession and comparative structures, and include some signpost words or discourse markers to achieve textual cohesion.
- Use topic sentences to organise paragraphs.
- Include a brief introduction and conclusion.
- Students peer edit their comparative scripts.
- Students swap and evaluate their writings.

⁷ Marchette Chute, *Stories from Shakespeare* (New York: Mentor Books Ltd, 1956) pp.88-94.

Transposition**Task 2: (b) (e) (f) (g), (h), (j) (k), (m)**

Students analyse and watch the subtitled BBC version (Directed by Desmond Davies, 1979) of *Measure for Measure* (3.1.53-151) or any other digital production of this scene. The teacher gives them a glossary of some of its language. The students discuss:

- i) What alternatives to making Isabella a celibate, Poor Clare novice could be presented in the scene with her imprisoned brother Claudio?
- ii) What other contemporary problems could this scene revolve around if you were modernising this play for a contemporary, local audience? Ideas that might emerge: surrogacy, a kidney transplant, sleeping with a sibling's husband/wife to have a child, swapping a baby, incest.

In small groups, students analyse the text again; each group addresses one of the following points:

- Why do you think the dialogue does not start directly with Isabella telling Claudio about Angelo's bribe?
- Which words, lines could be deleted, without changing the overall meaning and emotional effect of this dialogue?
- Comment on the most memorable and powerful lines in this dialogue.
- Comment on the language and cultural allusions you might need to change if the main problem or conflict was a contemporary one.
- Find lines in the scene that support the principles of 'doing the right thing for the wrong reason' and 'doing the wrong thing for the right reason'. Is there a general balance between these propositions?

- Are Claudio and Isabella credible characters? Consider their language feelings and response to the problem.

Write

In pairs, students rewrite the scene between Claudio and Isabella (3.1.53-151), where instead of Isabella refusing to lose her virginity to save her Brother Claudio's life, she refuses to make another kind of sacrifice for him.

Their scene can be in modern English, set in any context, but it should include some words or phrases from the Shakespearean extract, and the style of language should provide an insight into the cultural background of the two characters.

The scene should have a clear beginning, middle and end. It should demonstrate a build up of tension between the characters, which leads to some kind of communicative crisis.

Students write and enact their scenes, prompting more classroom readings and discussion of how the conflict is constructed in this scene, and identifying points of theatrical irony in Shakespeare's text.

Narrative voices, stances, and points of view

Task 3: (d),(f),(h), (i), (n), (n)

'...Make me thy story.' (1.4.29) In groups, students discuss and share responses to the following questions:

- Which characters' stories are represented in the play? By whom? Does this matter? Which characters tell their own stories? Are they their own stories or Shakespeare's manipulation of their personalities through their stories? What does the way the Duke tells Isabella the story about Mariana tell us about the Duke? (3.1.189-243)

- Where are characters back stories located in the play? Why?
- Who would you like to create a back story for? Why? What would it consist of? Where would you put it in the play? Write it.

Reformulation of genres

Task 4: (a), (b), (f), (g), (k)

Students analyse the text of Angelo's soliloquy and watch it (2.2.166-190). They then read the first two pages of *Basilikon Doron*, with three questions in mind:

What kind of a text is it?

When was it written?

What is its purpose?

Angelo's soliloquy as an 'open letter' to King James I, confessing his weaknesses in the face of temptation, pointing out how as the king's servant he wants to protect young men from the evil influences of women and advising them what to do if they see a beautiful 'temptress'. Use a metaphor where Angelo sees himself as the son of the State. Frame your letter in Angelo's intention to get royal approval for introducing a particular law.

Using primary literary sources in a discursive essay

Task 5: (l), (m), (n)

- With reference to some ideas in the play, *Basilikon Doron*, and W.H Auden's poem, 'Law like Love' (in Mendelson, 1976), write an essay (1,000 word limit): *The law is not a matter of revenge*. It should include:
 - A brief introduction,
 - Arguments and counter arguments
 - Examples

- A conclusion
- Appropriate acknowledgement techniques for all references

Task 6: (j), (l), (m), (n)

Provide students with a model of a discursive essay, so that they can analyse its rhetorical devices and modes of referencing. Students then draw on the critical and imaginative content arising from their creative writing to plan and produce an academic essay (1,500 words) on one of the 3 titles below. They collaborate on their plans and, ideas for selecting appropriate primary and secondary sources for the essay, but write individual drafts.

Different groups collaboratively plan and respond to each title:

1. *Measure for Measure* is a play without any credible arguments. Discuss.
2. Evaluate the role of narratives in *Measure for Measure*.
3. To what extent is *Measure for Measure* ‘a man’s play’?
 - Students find and share sources they will use
 - Plan an outline
 - Select quotes in the play
 - Write a draft
 - Students swap, discuss, edit and reformulate other group’s drafts into a final version of an argumentative essay.
 - Individually, students invent alternative argumentative essay titles on *Measure for Measure* and explain why they would be interested in responding to their own title.

Conclusion

This article has analysed how *Measure for Measure* invites the audience to assess its model of authority from political,

literary, and dramatic perspectives. I have not presented the writing activities within a set syllabus, timescale or within the framework of a case study, but more as an approach to teaching language awareness and composition skills without compromising on the literary and dramatic qualities of the play. They illustrate how some of *Measure for Measure's* controversial issues and divergent voices can be transposed to reader response tasks, whereby students become more alert to the drama's communicative style and Jacobean context. Students mainly write from the play rather than about the play; in doing so, they find a personal reason for reading and or watching the play script more carefully. *Measure for Measure* is thus pedagogically appropriated as a hands-on intratextual and intertextual writing experience that complements characteristics of Shakespeare's critical reading and craftsmanship.

The Author

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